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ABSTRACT

In order to determine whether the expertise of professionals in the field of psychiatry and law could be enhanced by the use of current awareness databases in addition to traditional online sources, the first of two papers in this document examines online searches on topics of interest to professionals in the psychiatry/law specialty. The use of three traditional databases, Legal Resource Index, MEDLINE, and PsycINFO, is compared with the use of three current awareness databases, PsycALERT, Newsearch, and PREV, and the currency of information obtained using the same strategy to search all six databases is discussed. It is concluded that current awareness databases are useful for producing the latest references and can be an effective aspect of comprehensive search strategies. The second paper investigates the currency of citations indexed in the PsycALERT database and the rapidity with which they are processed into the PsycINFO database. After an examination of seven online searches of PsycALERT which retrieved a significant number of articles more than one year old from date of search and not yet indexed in PsycINFO, it is concluded that investigators in need of a comprehensive or up-to-date search of the literature should include both PsycALERT and PsycINFO in their search strategies. (KM)

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"Current Awareness" in Forensic Psychiatry

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"Current Awareness" in Forensic Psychiatry

When performing evaluations or serving in the capacity of expert witness, professionals in the field of psychiatry and law rely not only on clinical judgement, but also on literature and information obtained from scholarly research. Since computerized on-line database retrieval is a critical adjunct in the information acquisition process, it seems incumbent upon practicing clinicians to have an awareness of the advantages and benefits of on-line bibliographic research strategies involving the utilization of available databases in law, medicine, and psychology. Moreover, one's level of expertise could be greatly enhanced through efficacious access to "current awareness" databases in addition to traditional on-line sources.

The current article illustrates two brief examples of comprehensive on-line searches on topics of interest to professionals in the psychiatry/law specialty. The citation output from this strategy was rather impressive - with many references to articles obtained from outside the databases normally accessed by practitioners.

TRADITIONAL DATABASES

One of the strategies emphasized in forensic-psychiatric literature retrieval is comprehensive coverage of a topic in

several databases which provide bibliographic citations extending back many years. Included among these traditional databases are: LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX (1980-present), MEDLINE (1966-present), and PsycINFO (1967-present). All three of these major databases access numerous psychiatric-legal periodicals. In addition, multi-database searching strategies have been shown to frequently produce non-duplicative citations that enhance production of relevant articles (Brand, 1979; Piotrowski and Perdue,1986).

Although this strategy yields excellent results, the cautious investigator will discover that most databases that claim to provide coverage from a stated beginning date up to the present actually do not include citations from sources published during the latest one to four month - and frequently longer - time period. Unfortunately, it is this current literature that is critical to practitioners attempting to retrieve up-to-date information in psychiatric/legal research.

CURRENT AWARENESS DATABASES

PsycINFO, one of the most popular databases, is updated once a month. These updates are based on receipt and indexing of publications by the American Psychological Association. In the monthly interims most publications received are entered as soon as possible in the companion database named PsycALERT.

This current awareness database contains references to publications within one to four months, and occasionally within two weeks of receipt by the APA. PsycALERT, which scans 1,300 serial publications, provides full bibliographic information and brief indexing for all material subsequently included in PsycINFO. PsycALERT has also been recently added to BRS under the acronym PSAL.

Another current awareness database is available in the field of law. This multidisciplinary database is entitled NEWSEARCH and serves as the daily update of six major databases including LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX. Among the numerous scholarly journals, magazines, and newspapers included in NEWSEARCH are 660 law journals and six law newspapers. This database adds approximately 2,000 records daily and retains these records from the first day of each month until the monthly update of the six databases.

A third current awareness database is entitled PREV. This file is available only through BRS and covers the contents of the most recent 3 to 4 months issues of 108 journals in the fields of medicine, psychiatry, psychology, nursing, and hospital literature. From PREV these references are then indexed in either MEDLINE or PsycINFO.

AN ILLUSTRATED ON-LINE SEARCH

In order to demonstrate the utility of accessing these current awareness databases two psychiatric/law terms were initially searched in LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX, MEDLINE, and PsycINFO with the search limited to the years 1980-1986. The terms searched in these three databases were "medical malpractice" or "professional liability." When the results of this search strategy were summed the three databases yielded the following results: LEGAL RESOURCE INDEX (662 references); MEDLINE (175 references); and PsycINFO (76 references). These results appear to be very comprehensive and certainly substantiate using a multidatabase search strategy.

The psychiatric researcher relying on the search results of one or more of these traditional databases will discover however, that the most recent literature is inaccessible because of the extended lag time required to fully index and process contemporary literature. It is precisely this current literature that is retrieved by the current awareness databases, NEWSEARCH, PREV, and PsycALERT. Following this rationale, the same terms used above were searched separately in the three current awareness databases to determine the number of additional unique

citations that could be identified in early October, 1986. The results of this search strategy are presented in Table 1.

INSERT TABLE 1

All 51 articles from this search were retrieved and compared for overlap or duplication. Surprisingly, the only duplicate citations were the three references identified by Psyc-ALERT with the term "medical malpractice." Otherwise there was no duplication of references either between different databases using the same term, or between search terms within the same database.

To illustrate just how effective current awareness retrieval can be, we selected an article entitled "The Professional Liability Crisis: An Interview with Joel Klein", from the October, 1986 issue of Hospital and Community Psychiatry, that was published after we performed the above search. This article was not included in the initial search, but appeared as a citation in PREV in a subsequent search of the three current awareness databases performed in December, 1986. This citation did not appear in a search of the traditional databases conducted on the same date. In short, this emphasizes how an article which has been recently published can be retrieved by relying

on multidatabase search strategies of the current awareness databases. A selected list of key articles from the current search is referenced in the appendix.

CONCLUSION

These results clearly demonstrate the efficacy of including current awareness databases in comprehensive research strategies, particularly in a field as diverse as forensic psychiatry. Different search topics will obviously yield varying degrees of overlap between these current awareness databases. Their usefulness, however, is their ability to produce the latest references that will be overlooked when one relies solely on the traditional databases. It seems apparent that professionals utilizing such research retrieval strategies in the psychiatry/law arena will find their expertise much enhanced.

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Appendix

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Table 1

Search Terms and Number of "Hits"

Database	"Medical Malpractice"	"Professional Liability"
PsycALERT	3	32
NEWSEARCH	8	3
PREV	4	1

How Alert is PsycALERT ?

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Abstract

PsycALERT is the "current awareness" online database utilized by psychological researchers in need of newly published literature. Investigators surmise that PsycALERT citations are rapidly indexed, remain in the file for a short period of time, and are then expediently processed into the PsycINFO database. The present inquiry found that this is not necessarily the case, and that about 50 percent of retrieved articles through PsycALERT were actually older than 1 year from the time of the search. The authors illustrate this contention by providing several online searches of PsycALERT. Researchers involved in comprehensive literature retrieval, or in need of the most up-to-date research would best utilize both PsycALERT and PsycINFO to obtain satisfactory bibliographic results.

How Alert Is PsycALERT ?

PsycINFO is usually the online database of choice when researchers in psychology are involved in literature retrieval. Moreover, investigators can access the most up-to-date research in psychology by utilizing the database PsycALERT which comprizes recently published literature in the field from over 1,400 journals and serial publications. In fact, PsycALERT is promoted as a "current awareness" bibliographic source because "the database provides full bibliographic information and brief indexing of newly published material subsequently transferred each month to its companion database, PsycINFO. Items indexed for PsycALERT are searchable in as little as one to two weeks of receipt at PsycINFO" (DIALOG Information Retrieval Service, 1984). Furthermore, the PsycINFO producers at APA state:

> Until now, there was a processing and production time gap between publication of the original article and the appearance of its abstract in the PsycINFO database. Now current references are available from the 1,400 serial publications with full bibliographic citations - updated weekly.

Researchers surmise that PsycALERT's publication coverage spans from several weeks to several months duration for a recently published article at which time it is fully indexed in PsycINFO. This is a critical point since investigators that access the world's literature in psychology and related disciplines assume that the bulk of research on a selected topic or body of knowledge is indexed in PsycINFO. On the other hand, if current literature (i.e., articles published over the past several months) is desired, a search of PsycALERT would indeed seem appropriate.

Over the past several years the authors have been extensively involved in literature retrieval and have frequently utilized both the PsycINFO and PsycALERT databases. Surprizingly, we discovered that publication dates for many article citations in PsycALERT were older than one year from the time the search was conducted. This observation was somewhat disconcerting since use of PsycINFO was purposely omitted so as to acquire only the most recent articles on a particular research topic.

The purpose of the present inquiry was to determine the number of citations retrieved through PsycALERT that were dated beyond one year from the time of the search. Table 1 summarizes the descriptors or title keywords selected for each search and the total number of retrieved

citations (hits); moreover, the number of hits are grouped by publication date from the time of each search.

Insert Table 1 about here

The results of the 7 online searches of PsycALERT illustrate that a significant number of articles (approximately 50 percent) are more than one year old from date of search. This finding is a bit perplexing since the PsycINFO producers imply that citations are briefly indexed in PsycALERT and are rotated into PsycINFO within a few months of publication. Apparently, to the unwary researcher, some recent citations are omitted when a computer search is limited to the PsycINFO database alone.

The reasons for retention of dated materials in PsycALERT are numerous - not the least of which is an indexing backlog by the database producer. Additionally, the date of receipt for indexing by PsycALERT frequently dictates that some citations will be older than anticipated. This is particularly evident with foreign journals and back-files of new journals added to the database source list. It is also significant that indexing priority is given to APA journals. It should also be pointed out that dissertations are not included in PsycALERT, but are indexed in PsycINFO.

For those investigators in need of a comprehensive or up-to-date search of the literature, it appears necessary that research strategies include both PsycALERT and PsycINFO. In fact, in order to achieve comprehensive results, multi-database search strategies have been suggested in the social and behavioral sciences (Brand, 1979; Piotrowski & Perdue, 1986; Perdue & Piotrowski, 1987). Only in this manner is the astute researcher confident of a thorough and complete search of the literature.

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Table 1

Frequency of Citations (Hits)

Search terms	< 6 mo.	6 mo. < 1 yr.	1 yr. < 18 mo.	18 mo. < 2 yr.	> 2 yr.	Total hits
Crime & alcohol/ drug abuse		4			1	5
Memory & hypnosis		4	2	1	1	8
Professional liability	5	5	2	7	1	20
Business organi- zations & planning	1			1		2
Draw-a-person (test)	1		1		1	3
Child support		2	1			3
Competency to stand trial	2	8	13	1		24